RULES FOR HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

3

With certain and saving Benefit.

By *DANIEL BURGESS*,
Minister of the Gospel.

Hear and your Soul shall live.—ISAIAH lv. 3.

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TO THE READER.

UPON peruſing this ſmall, yet comprehenſive treatiſe, and at the ſame time reflecting upon the inattention of too many in all congregations, and looking upon this to be one great cauſe why ſo many faithful miniſters of the word labour for nought, and in vain; theſe with other conſiderations induced me to republiſh this univerſal addreſs to mankind.

The valuable AUTHOR, *whoſe name is precious to many, unto this very day, always preached and wrote with the utmoſt plainneſs.*

This little treatiſe is peculiarly brief, clear, full, and pertinent. The rules are admirably ſuited to inſtruct chriſtians in following that neceſſary advice of our Saviour: Take heed HOW you hear; *and may, by the divine bleſſing, be of great ſervice. Not forgetting another branch of our Lord's advice,* Take heed WHAT you hear. *Hear only ſuch preaching as tends to humble the creature, exalt the Saviour, and promote holineſs: and hear only ſuch preachers as appear to be exemplary in their conduct, ſerious in their ſpirits, and faithful in their work.*

This advice is more eſpecially needful at preſent, when the preachers and profeſſors of the ſame goſpel are ſo unhappily divided into various and different opinions, concerning the way of our common ſalvation, to the diminution of univerſal charity, and increaſe of mutual prejudice; to contribute humbly to the removal of which is the deſire, and will, if accompliſh'd, be the delight of The Publiſher.

LEEDS, Oct. 16, 1771.

Rules for hearing the Word of GOD, *with certain ſaving Benefit.*

BEFORE you Hear.

DIrection I. *Pray for a Bleſſing.* Aſk and you ſhall receive it. Sincere hearty prayer is ſtill a Prevailer; and then *moſt* when it is for Gifts that be *beſt*. But by not aſking a *Bleſſing*, you deſerve a *Curſe*: becauſe you do virtually tell God, either that you *need not* his ſpirit, or that you *deſire not* the ſaving efficacy of his word. Neglect of prayer will ruin the *beſt* hearer; holy uſe of it will ſave the *worſt* hearer.

Direct. II. *Uſe forecaſt againſt diſtractions in hearing.* Wrath, and luſt, and ſinful paſſions will take

away your heart at ſermons; but a conſtant cordial *watch* and *fight* againſt them, will deſtroy thoſe deſtroyers. God will let no ſoul be devoured by them, that is diligent to keep from them: Though on the other hand, ſouls that do little to *prevent* them, ſhall be *plagued* with them. Divine *grace* will not encourage your ſinful *negligence:* No, but the Temptations which overtake you *wilfully*, ſhall overcome you *wofully*. Believe ſad experience, others and your own.

Direct. III. *Value the word, and the preaching of it, and thank God for them both.* Honour them for *God's* ſake, and God will honour and bleſs you for his ſon's ſake, and for his *promiſe* ſake: God is ſo free of his bleſſing on both, that he lets no man who highly prized it, go without it You may highly prize *gold* and *ſilver*, and go without them: but the *richer treaſure* of the goſpel is certainly your own, if you can but *ſupremely* value it. If you do deſpiſe it, blame yourſelves that you are not enriched by it. God will

will not throw his ineſtimable *pearl* unto ungrateful *ſwine:* Swine that will not give ſo much as *thanks* for the *pearl* of greateſt price.

Direct. IV. *Acquaint your ſelves well with the ends and uſes of the word.* Read *books*, and aſk *miniſters*, and know as well as they, to what purpoſes God ſendeth his oracles: The four comprehenſive ends are, to *convince* of ſin, to *convert* unto jeſus Chriſt, to *confirm* in grace, to *direct* and *comfort* in obedience: underſtand theſe, and muſe much on them. Come to ſermons for theſe, and you ſhall not go from ſermons without them: But *God hath not pleaſure in fools:* and if you come to hear for you know not what, it's no marvel if you come away fools as you went.

Direct. V. *Never forget God's promiſe of bleſſing on dutiful hearing.* He cannot lie; and he has told you, *hear and your ſouls ſhall live.* Keep you that promiſe of his as the apple of your eye. It will do your heart good to think, God hath not left himſelf at

liberty to *bleſs* or not *bleſs* your hearing: No, but that his FREE grace is alſo BOUND grace; bound by *word* and *oath*. This will give you *holy boldneſs*, to which God always giveth *happy welcome*. But the want of this in your mind, will keep it full of *curſed* and *malignant* doubts and fears. Without a miracle of grace it will hold you *fearful*, and hold you *unbelieving*; that is, periſhing.

Direct. VI. *Honourably uſe your advocates*. All the week long honour the *ſon of* God, as he in whom alone you can ever have *acceptance* with God: and honour the *holy ſpirit* of God, by whom alone you can ever have effectual *aſſiſtance* to any good. No man ever thus honoured the *ſon* and *ſpirit*, and went without the full bleſſing of the *word*. Without our interceſſor in heaven, and our interceſſor in our hearts, we can *profitably* do nothing; but with them we may do every thing *proſperouſly*: Therefore be ſermons every-where ſo loſt, becauſe this dependance on Chriſt and on his ſpirit

are

are ſcarce any where found. O that this word might be well weighed!

Direct. VII. *Conclude upon it, the word will be the ſavour of life or death unto you.* It will *cure* you, or further *kill* you; and give *life* to *life*, or *death* to *death*. Give yourſelves this *preparatory ſermon* before you come to hear *mine*. Miniſters ſermons *ſoften* or *harden* hearers ſouls; they never leave you (in degrees of good or evil) as they find you. Such fore-thoughts are ordinary *antecedents* and direct *cauſes* of no ſmall good.

IN Hearing the Word.

DIrection I. *Approve plainneſs and Power.* Not only *excuſe* and *endure*, but *approve* and *prefer* them. You like beſt the phyſician that *heals* beſt; and the counſellor at law that *beſt brings you to peace and quiet poſſeſſion of your inheritance*; tho' neither of them do *compliment* you at all, but

reprove

reprove you much, and chaſtiſe your miſchievous folly with needful ſeverity. Be as wiſe for your ſouls as for your bodies and eſtates. God heals the ſick ſouls that prefer and uſe his own preſcribed plain medicines: But nice and peeviſh ones, that loath his *manna*, and muſt have *quails*; that diſguſt his *ſharp word*, and muſt be treated with mens *ſmooth words*; ſuch muſt die in their pride and folly. Where preachers be but *muſicians*, churches be but *golgotha's*.

Direct. II. *Receive the faithful miniſter's words as God's own:* for ſo they are; they are God's words *originally*; his ſermons as well as his text, is all of it ſo. They are God's words *materially*, as to the matter and ſenſe of them. They are God's words to you *inſtitutively*; by God's command they be ſpoken unto you. They are God's words given *advantageouſly*; words of God, by the kindneſs of God, delivered with more advantage for your minds and hearts than in the *holy ſcripture* barely

barely read: words of God, with a *comment of his appointment:* Words of God, to which he hath made a *ſpecial promiſe* of higheſt bleſſing: for *faith* (eminently) *comes by hearing* theſe words: *He that heareth you, heareth me,* ſaith Chriſt to the preachers that he ſent. Receive every goſpel ſermon as by Chriſt, *preached,* and doubt not but it ſhall be by Chriſt *bleſs'd*: But if you take the *words* as well as the *breath* of a ſermon, for *ours,* the miſtake will be a deadly loſs of *yours.*

Direct. III. *Mix abundance of prayer with your hearing.* Souls are ſpirits, their motions are ſwifter than the ſun's; they *can,* and they *ought* to do two things at once: *ejaculation* helps *attention,* and not hinders it: Bread and ſalt muſt be in every meal, and ſhort warm prayer in every duty. Let your hearts cry out at every *truth* delivered, *O Lord, fix this truth on my ſoul!* At every *precept* and *promiſe, good God, help me to obey this command, and to rely on this promiſe!*

At

At every *reproof, glorious ſpirit, convince and humble me for this ſin, and lead me to Chriſt for pardon*, &c. Such *praying hearers* never loſe their *labours*. But wo to them, who tho' at ſermon-time they be not *deaf adders*, yet they be *dumb dogs*, whoſe *hearts* do not to this purpoſe ſpeak, while their *ears* hear. I do not *well hearken* to the Ambaſſador, when I *pray* not *much* to the King.

Direct. IV. *Apply to your own ſouls what the preacher ſaith to all.* To know *for one's good*, the Hebrews call to know *for one's ſelf*: And do not all the world ſo do? miniſters be *nurſes*, ſermons be *breaſts*, God's word is *milk*, hearers be the *children*, and right hearing is their *ſucking* the milk into each one's own ſoul. What another *ſucks* and applies, will not *nouriſh* thee. Say thou then of every *doctrine, this is my leſſon, I will learn it*: Of every *command, this is my duty, I will do it*: Of every *promiſe, this is my encouragement, and I will make meat and drink of it*; *my ſoul*

ſhall

ſhall rely and feed hereon. Who ever miſſed of life by the word of life, that ſo took it to themſelves? Who did ever thus *ſuck*, and not *grow* by the goſpel's milk? Bleſſed are they that thus *monopolize* a ſermon: while, to be ſure, all are *ſtarved* that do not thus *feed*, whatever dainties are ſet before them. And they are the moſt *miſerable of all the damned*, who ſtarve themſelves where *they might have feaſted*.

Direct. V. *Expreſs your reverence of God in a ſermon, unto all the congregation.* God is ſpecially preſent in *heaven*, and at a *ſermon*: Do you believe it? Then ſhow that faith of yours: Shew it to your God, and to your conſcience, by holy *thoughts* and holy *affections*: Yea, and ſhew it to all the church by your *well-compoſed countenances* and *becoming geſtures*. Your *bodies* are Gods as well as your *ſouls*: If you do not glorify him *with both*, you glorify him *with neither*. God lays no hard impoſitions on aged, ſickly, weak bodies: But he requires

others

others to give him *reverent poſtures*. *Gadding eyes* are impudent publiſhers of profane *rambling hearts*; and of thoſe fools, whereof one makes many. Put off your ſhoes, and keep them off while you are on holy ground: That is, *be reverent in ſoul and body*. So honour God before all the people, and then he ſhall make it ſeen before all the people, how he honoureth and bleſſeth you. Irreverence at a *ſermon*, is a publick call to God for *damnation*: A conſtructive bidding God to damn you, where hundreds may be witneſſes to it; and, without God's great grace be *poiſoned* by it.

Direct. VI. *Honour the Preacher as a man of God, and no more*. God ſtiles a miniſter by that name; and God's names be the moſt proper and inſtructive. A miniſter is *but a man*; do not therefore *adore* him as a God. Let him be ſo thy *miniſter*, that Chriſt may ſtill be thy only ſupreme *ſhepherd and Biſhop*. He is, *but a man*; expect therefore and bear with his *infirmities*,

mities, and pray God for his *aſſiſtances* to him. He is *but a man*; therefore pin not thy faith on his ſleeve, but exerciſe thy *own ſenſe*, and beg the guidance of God's *holy ſpirit*. Yet nevertheleſs, he is *a man of God*, remember: If not, do not hear him: If ſo, conſider while thou art hearing, he is *one that hath received the holy ghoſt*; he is *one that Chriſt hath qualified and commiſſioned, under himſelf, to be a ſaviour of thee*, and of all that hear him. Wherefore do not deſpiſe him, as not adore him. Thou ſhalt profit by him, if thou heareſt him as he is, an *ambaſſador of God*, *a meſſenger of Chriſt*, an *overſeer made by the holy ghoſt*. But wo is thine, if thou followeſt him either as *a God*, or as *a common man*. The goſpel pronounceth no bleſſing upon the *ſuperſtitious*, or upon the *profane*.

Direct. VII. *Project to retain as much as may be of what you hear.* All along your *hearing*, deſign and do what you can for *remembring*. Say over to yourſelves the *doctrine* many

times, and, if you can, repeat to yourſelves all the *heads* of the diſcourſe; but lay faſt hold of the *main drift* of every ſermon. However *nature*, *ſickneſs* or *age* may have incurably wounded your memories, God is gracious, remember. He will accept an *unfeigned good-will* for the very *deed*. His ſpirit ſhall be *a never-failing remembrancer*, to ſuch as againſt their wills, and againſt their *endeavours*, be forgetful. He will not call them *forgetful hearers*, that ſtrain and ſtrive, and do their beſt to be *tenacious* ones. But he will ſo *call*, and will *curſe* thoſe, who *like not and liſt not* to retain his word, as well as to receive it. Hearers *ſo wilfully dull*, muſt look to *remain among the dead*. As they are *ſlothful*, they are *wicked* ſervants. And let them expect Chriſt's foretold word. *Depart ye curſed*. Heaven is no hive for *drones*. Ignorance is a *curſe*; and if it be your *choice*, it will as ſurely be your deſtruction as your option.

AFTER

AFTER hearing God's Word.

DIrection I. *Take the moſt earneſt heed that you do not let ſlip what you have received.* Your memories be the *great ſervants* of your faith, hope and obedience; and they are but *imperfectly ſanctified:* they be too much like the grates that let go *clean water*, and hold *filthy mud.* If you take *little pains* about them, you will have but *ſorry ſervice* from them. The beſt ground will never hold the *good ſeed*, if no care be had to drive off the *fowls* that will be coming and catching it away, and if labour be not beſtow'd to harrow it in. This labour *for the word* is labour *in the Lord*; and it ſhall *not be in vain.* Thus do, you ſhall ſurely proſper, and do well. But if this be too much in your conceits; if you are *lame*, and will not uſe *crutches*; if you cannot otherwiſe, *remember*, and you will not *talk* with yourſelves and families of a ſermon; nor go forth unto a *repetition*; nor *ask the holy ſpirit* to be your remembrancer;

brancer; you muſt take to your *ſorrow*, what you get by your *ſloth*. The *devil* cannot rob you of a ſermon *againſt your will:* and *God* will not keep a ſermon in your mind *without your will.*

Direct. II. *Let your thanks be returned after every ſermon heard.* Thanks and praiſe are God's *dearly beloved*; the *end of all his works*; of your *beings*, your *redemption*, your *goſpel-calls*, all *ordinances* and *providences*. It is *hell* where *no* praiſe and thanks are; and it is *heaven* where there is *nothing beſides*. Nothing delighteth God ſo much as theſe; and for nothing on this earth doth God expect theſe, more than for his *goſpel preached*. When it is ſaid, *he giveth his word*, 'tis preſently added, *praiſe ye the Lord*. And this praiſe we are told, *ſhall pleaſe the Lord better than an ox or bullock*, than any external ſacrifice. If *unprofitableneſs* by the word do not drive away *thankfulneſs*, *thankfulneſs* for the word ſhall be ſure to drive away *unprofitableneſs*. Let your

your thanks be more than *verbal*, your profit ſhall be *real*: It ſhall *appear to all men.* But as long as you *bear unthankfully*, you muſt *be* and *appear unholy*. Ingratitude doth, of any ſin to be named, turn honey into gall, and phyſick into poiſon. It is the ſame thing, to call a man *unthankful*, and to ſay he is a *ſamaritan, and hath a devil.*

Direct. III. *Lament your ſins in hearing, and go act faith on Chriſt for your pardon.* Abundance of *droſs* is in all our *gold*. Iniquity abounds in our *holy things*. The holieſt of them all need a *thouſand pardons*, and deſerve our *deepeſt bluſhes*. And let us not flatter ourſelves; *repenting and believing be not things indifferent*, or acts of *mere chriſtian liberty*, but *indiſpenſable duty*. They muſt go before the ſeal of our pardon, in our *conſcience* or in *heaven*. And believe it, God is incenſed with ſin, *whoever* it be that ſinneth, and in *whatever*. He delighteth to be *kind*, but he hateth to be *fond*. As ever you would profit by a ſermon, follow it

with the *tears of repentance*, and with the *prayers of faith*. Then will God give you profit, *with meaſure preſſed down and running over*. If you are too *proud* for this; in God's name I tell you, that pride of yours ſhall have a ſhameful fall. The beſt thing *proud*, is worſe than the worſt that is truly *humble*.

Direct. IV. *Examine with humble diligence, what in hearing appeared to you as doubtful.* Suſpect *your own underſtandings* more than your *miniſter's*, but lean not *raſhly* on your own, or *idolatrouſly* on his. If error be in his *doctrine*, it turns to poiſon in *thy ſoul*. Wherefore do not *ſwallow* what thou doſt *ſuſpect*. The moſt-*noble hearers* try all doctrine by the *holy ſcriptures*. Good children aſk their parents advice; wiſe women aſk their huſbands; the wiſe of all ſorts go aſk their miniſters, and intreat them to clear up by God's written word the truth of their preached word. Thus do; and whoever be barren hearers, you ſhall be fruitful ones. God never fails to teach

ſouls

ſouls ſo careful to imbibe nothing but truth. O happy church where, *Mal.* ii. 7 is wiſely and duly obſerved! where *miniſter's lips* preſerve knowledge, and people ſeek it at their mouths. But it is no more than is to be expected, if ſtupid *drones* and contentious *cavillers*, live *idiots*, and die without *ſaving wiſdom.* God's curſe reſts on the idle, and he reſiſteth the proud.

Direct. V. *Prove your ſtate and condition by every goſpel-ſermon.* You cannot try too often, things whereof you can never be *ſufficiently* certain: I mean ſo much certain, but that you will ſtill need to be more certain. You are true believers and alive to God, or unbelievers and dead in ſin and miſery. You are ſtrong in the grace that is in Chriſt, or babes weak in the ſame. It is a ſorry ſermon by which no help is given you, to form a judgment of yourſelves touching theſe things. God's bleſſing upon your conſcientious care to make uſe of the help, you need not to diſtruſt. His command on you to prove yourſelves, is not without

without a promiſe of bleſſing made to it. He ever enricheth thoſe hearers, who uſe ſermons as ſcales to weigh, and touchſtones to try their ſouls. But as for the preſumptuous, who dream themſelves to be as good as they need to be; and the deſpairing, who conclude that they ſhall remedileſly abide as bad as they are, and therefore never put the word of God ſo cloſe unto them; what hope of theſe! God will condemn thoſe by his word, who will not judge themſelves by it. If you will not make it a light unto you, he will make it fire to you.

Direct. VI. *Carry on your knowledge, memory, and every good purpoſe, unto practice.* Chriſtian divinity is an art of doing more than knowing God's will, remembring it, and temporarily purpoſing to do it: It teacheth living unto God. Word and ſacraments, yea faith and repentance, all are for obedience. God gave his ſon, and ſent down his ſpirit, to get him a people zealous of good works as well as

as words. Much fruit it is (and not your fair leaves) that glorifieth God. And it is the hearer, rich in good works, that God will glorify: the hearer, to whoſe feet the word is a light, to walk by it; as well as a light to his head, to talk by it. I have warrant from our ſaviour to tell you; If you hear his word, and ſo keep it, you ſhall have greater honour than the virgin Mary had in being his mother. And do you but ſtill do the word of his that you know, you ſhall never fail to be made know the word that he would have you to do. Uſe well your hands and feet, and he will make every ſermon a royal ſalve to your eyes. But from him that practiſeth not what he knows, from him ſhall be taken the light that he hath: To him is promiſed no more light; unto him is threatned the darkeſt fire, *Luke* xxviii. 29. Heathen moraliſts hold no man to be ſo very bad, as he who acts evil, and no more than talks of good. Chriſtian ones muſt needs pronounce them the worſt monſters,

monſters, that ſpeaks as with cloven tongues, and yet, as negroes, are no where white but in the mouth.

Direct. VII. *Teach your relations what God teacheth you at ſermons.* God will never forfeit his name of love; nor fail to reward charity, and ſpecially ſoul-charity. It is the devil's proverb, *the free ſhall not be fat.* God's proverb is, *the liberal ſoul ſhall be made fat, and he that waters others ſhall be watered.* God will hide nothing from an *Abraham*, for this very reaſon, becauſe he will inſtruct all his family with it. Go you now and inſtruct yours; ſo ſhall you be taught of God as you have never been in paſt days: drop divine truths on them, and God ſhall make ſermons rain down rich ſhowers on you. But vain are your idle moans, while you are uncharitable to your relations. If I know the mind of God, he will ſtarve you if you will not feed them. God is a great lover of children; and our children are his more than ours. Nor can you eaſily incenſe God more, than by neglect

neglect of theſe his children. I wonder not that many hear and underſtand not; becauſe what they underſtand, they teach not. You may be ever learning, but you ſhall never come to the ſaving knowledge of the truth, until you make conſcience of communicating the truth you know. Thus ſpend, and God will ſend. Teach others, and God will teach you; comfort them, and God ſhall increaſe and multiply comfort to you.

When theſe rules ſhall be obſerved, miniſters ſhall be joyful (both) fathers and nurſes: the bed of Chriſt ſhall be green in our aſſemblies. It ſhall be no more querulouſly ſaid, that our ſermons have miſcarrying wombs and dry breaſts. Joy ſhall be made in heaven, and in the midſt of us. Fear ſhall come on every ſoul of our ſcorners. We ſhall praiſe God as the primitive chriſtians, and have favour with all the people. The word of God ſhall ſo run and be glorified; and God, even our own God, ſhall ſo bleſs us. Amen.

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